

Age-old Teesta Bridge turns risky

Leaseholder adding to the worry for 'extra bucks'

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Over century-old Teesta Bridge has turned risky, much to the worry of thousands of commuters of Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts.

The leaseholder is allegedly allowing heavy vehicles including lorry to cross the bridge for 'extra money'.

Constructed as a 2100-foot railway bridge over Teesta River in Lalmonirhat Sadar in 1901, the bridge is known as the doorway to the two districts. Approximately 1500 vehicles cross the bridge every day.

Following an agreement between Bangladesh Railway and the Roads and Highways Department, light vehicles started crossing the bridge after placement of wooden floorboards in 1978. The authorities allowed only passenger vehicles to cross it at that time.

Later, in sheer violation of the agreement, heavy vehicles including ten-wheeled lorries also started crossing the bridge, eventually shortening its lifespan. The usable time of the bridge, which was hundred years from construction, expired nine years ago.

Now people travel through the bridge risking lives as movement of heavy vehicles caused damage to the

wooden sleepers, turning it unfit for movement.

The leaseholder gets Tk 30 as toll money against per vehicle loaded up to five tonnes but he allegedly receives handsome amounts of money from vehicles loaded over ten tonnes, even ten-wheeled ones.

Violation of the restriction on heavily loaded vehicles is frequent especially during the night with the help of a section of railway staff and some policemen who allegedly get share of the money, sources said.

Denying allegations of taking additional toll money by allowing heavily loaded vehicles, Golam Mostofa Swapon, the leaseholder of the bridge, however, said, "I hardly know about the matter."

Railway Divisional Engineer, Lalmonirhat Asadul Haque said, "As heavy vehicles ply through the bridge, wooden sleepers got damaged before the expiry time."

This is posing risk for train services as well as movement of other vehicles.

"We have already sent a letter to the higher authorities concerned on December 10 after another one in last month for taking necessary steps in this regard. But we are yet to get any response from the authorities," said Asadul Haque.

Meanwhile, during a visit to the area on Tuesday,

State Minister for Mass and Primary Education Motahar Hossain said the under construction new Teesta road bridge over Teesta River in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila will be opened in June, 2011.

"Necessary action will be taken officially against the construction firm if the contractors of the construction firm fail to complete the bridge by schedule time on 31 May in 2011. Time was extended for third time so far," the state minister said.

Locals, however, expressed doubt about timely completion of the new bridge given the reality that the work was going on in a very slow pace.

The construction firm missed two deadlines to complete construction of the bridge on September 9 in 2009 and May 31 in 2010, they said.

The construction work of the 750 metre-long and 12.11 metre-wide road bridge over Teesta River began on September 7, 2006 and it was scheduled to be completed by three years, costing Tk 87 crore.

The Bangladesh government provided 85 percent of the fund and the rest was given by the Kuwait government.

Two construction firms -- Amin-Delim (Bangladesh) and ASCO (India) are constructing the bridge under a joint venture.



PHOTO: STAR
This time-expired railway-cum-road bridge over the Teesta River in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila has turned awfully risky as the wooden floorboards, set in 1978 to facilitate movement of light vehicles, have weakened due to plying of heavy vehicles.

VICTORY DAY IN FRAME



PHOTO: STAR
1) Children at Victory Day programme in Chittagong Stadium depict the heroic action of freedom fighters during the 1971 Liberation War, 2) The deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police of Narsingdi receive salute from a Victory Day march past of children, 3) Girls of Government Children's Home display the form of a victory memorial at Chapainawabganj Stadium, 4) Freedom fighters and people from cross sections of the society place wreaths on the graves of Mohammad Ali, the first Liberation War martyr in Thakurgaon, and two other unnamed martyrs, 5) People from remote areas march towards Magura town to join Victory Day programmes, and 6) Cultural activists bring out a procession in Pabna town demanding early trial of war criminals.

Unruly acts of rogue ruling party men

STAR NATIONAL DESK

The Victory Day was celebrated amid untoward incidents at three places of Jhalakathi, Jhenidah and Nilphamari districts yesterday.

In Jhalakathi, at least 20 people were injured and two buses and local BNP office damaged during a clash between the activists of Awami League and BNP at Rajapur upazila headquarters in the morning, reports a correspondent from Barisal.

Witnesses said the clash ensued when the AL men attacked a BNP procession near by-pass road crossing at around 7:30am. The BNP men were returning to their party office in a procession after placing wreaths at liberation war monument.

Both sides equipped with lethal weapons attacked each other, made chase and counter chase. AL men ransacked local BNP office while the BNP activists damaged two passenger buses during the incident. Being informed Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel rushed to the spot, dispersed the clashing groups and brought the situation under control.

The injured were admitted to local health complex and hospitals at Jhalakathi. Police later arrested three BNP activists-Forkan, Abdullah and Fayedz--for damaging the buses.

Our Jhenidah correspondent reported that a dais erected by local BNP at Uzir Ali Secondary School ground in Sadar upazila for Victory Day

function was damaged allegedly by BCL activists. District BNP Joint Secretary MA Majid told this correspondent that Chhatra League and Juba League activists vandalised the stage on Thursday night.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Jhenidah Sadar Police Station said unidentified people vandalised the stage made by BNP.

A programme arranged by Jaldhaka upazila administration to honour the local freedom fighters on the occasion of the Victory Day was spoiled yesterday as BCL activists protested the presence of a Jamaat leader at the programme, according to our correspondent.

Sources said the upazila administration arranged the function at Jaldhaka Stadium to honour the freedom fighters in the morning. Upazila Chairman Sayed Ali, also a rokan of Jamaat-e-Islami, attended the function as chief guest while Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sarwar Hossain as special guest.

As the function started, a group of BCL men raised slogans against Jamaat leader Sayed Ali and ransacked the dais.

Freedom fighter Abdul Gaffar said pro-liberation forces cannot accept the presence of a man belonging to the anti-liberation force. He also criticised the upazila administration for its failure to invite the local AL leaders to the function.

Outlaw killed in Kushtia 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An operative of Janajuddha faction of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (BPCP-ML) was killed in a "gunfight" with law enforcers in Doulatpur upazila of Kushtia yesterday.

The dead, Mosharrif Hossain alias Bomaru Musa, 35, son of Hobis Uddin of Angdia village in the upazila, was accused in eight cases including two for killings, police said.

Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Doulatpur Police Station, said a joint team of Rapid Action Battalion-12 and police, on

secret information, raided Chatarpara field around 1:30am where Musa along with his accomplices were holding a clandestine meeting.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, the gang opened fire on the team, compelling the team to retaliate with gunfire.

At one stage, the outlaws managed to flee the scene. Later, police found the bullet-hit body of Musa lying on the ground.

Two light guns, four bombs, five rounds of bullets, and two sharp weapons were recovered from the spot.

Drive soon to recover Khulna canals, Mayur River from grabbers

ADB to provide Tk 350 cr aid, says Mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide Tk 350 crore for implementation of the project undertaken by Khulna City Corporation (KCC) for excavation of 26 canals and dredging of Mayur River in the city and its suburbs.

Recovery of the river and canals from encroachers has been put as a precondition for getting the ADB loan, said Khulna City Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque.

A fresh drive for eviction of

encroachers, demolishing unauthorised structures will be launched soon, said panel mayor-1 Ajmol Ahmed Tapan, also the convener of the 15-member eviction committee formed early this year.

He said recovery of canals from encroachers and dredging of Mayur River are being given top priority to ensure flow of rainwater from drains to solve the city's water-logging problem.

The encroachers also include an executive engineer (mechanical) of Khulna City Corporation who erected unauthorised structures

filling a big canal with earth in 2006, the panel mayor added.

"We are determined to launch an eviction drive by third week of this month without showing compassion to anyone whoever he or she may be," KCC Mayor told this correspondent yesterday.

The fund to be provided by ADB for implementation of the project would be spent honestly for the purpose it is meant for, the mayor said.

He further said the implementation of this project will bring about a radical change in the economic development of Khulna city.

PCP to block road today

A CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP), the student wing of United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), has called dawn-to-dusk road blockade in the district today to protest police action on its rally on Wednesday.

The day-long programme was called through a press release signed by press secretary of Khagrachhari district PCP Bipul Chakma.

Police attacked the rally, fired bullets injuring at least 10 indigenous people while 15 leaders were arrested alleged Uzzal Sritee Chakma, district coordinator of UPDF in a separate press release.

He demanded immediate release of all the arrestees and action against the attackers.

Police said, investigation officer (IO) assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Mohammad Ashraf produced 10 PCP activists before the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Abdullah Al Mamun yesterday afternoon seeking five days remand. However, the court sent the accused to jail rejecting the bail prayer.

Meanwhile, sub-inspector Md Shafiqul Islam filed a case accusing 24 identified and over 500 unidentified PCP leaders and activists in connection with the attack on police on Wednesday.

SYLHET GAS OFFICIAL MURDER Victim's tenant held as suspect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police yesterday arrested a youth for his alleged involvement in the killing of Anwara Begum Chowdhury, an official of state-run Jalalabad Gas and a freedom fighter on December 9.

The decomposed body of Anwara was recovered from her Lamabazar residence in the city.

Police brought Osman Gani, 21, a tenant of one of the flats of Anwara's house, before local newsmen yesterday evening at the office of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP) Commissioner Dr Aftab Ahmed.

But the journalists were not allowed to ask him any question for, what the officials said, the sake of investigation.

Osman, son of late Jahur Ali of Janigaon under Sunamganj Sadar Police station was arrested from his village home earlier yesterday.

Police officials said, on October 23 Osman rented a ground floor flat of the 4-storey building of Anwara and used fictitious home address



Anwara Begum Chowdhury and fake father's name for getting enrolled in a city computer training center.

However, police declined to divulge the motive behind Osman's alleged involvement in the killing. They said police would be able to unearth the mystery behind the killing after quizzing Osman thoroughly.

SMP Deputy Commissioner Rezaul Karim told this correspondent that in addition to a blood stained shirt, the personal laptop and movie camera of the deceased were also recovered from Osman's house at the time of his arrest.



PHOTO: STAR
Barisal Government Girls' School, which played a glorious role in spreading education among women since its establishment in 1923, prepares to celebrate its 87th founding anniversary and a grand reunion of present and former students. Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni and former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal are expected to attend as chief guests on the first and second day of the gala to be inaugurated by Barisal City Corporation Mayor Shawkat Hossain Hiron today.